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Curious minds: the discoveries of Australian naturalists

by Peter Macinnes

Publisher: *National Library of Australia, Canberra*. 2012, 213 pages, paperback, coloured illustrations, ISBN 9780642277541. RRP \$39.99

Curious minds: the discoveries of Australian naturalists is the most recent in a line of beautifully presented books from the National Library of Australia (NLA) on historical aspects of Australian natural history. The objective is to publish books as part of the process of interpreting and highlighting the NLA collection. This much is part of the charter of the Library, and this book is a fine example of the production standard that has been achieved in fulfilling that role.

The text consists of 26 short biographical essays. The subjects of these pieces are individuals, 39 in number, who are judged to have made contributions to an understanding of Australian natural history, in a 200-year-period beginning in the 1680s. These biographical sketches are grouped in six sections, under headings that are meant to indicate something of the circumstances or type of activity in which the contribution was made. These sections are presented in more-or-less chronological order, following a brief Introduction.

In the first section, 'Australian nature discovered', the focus of attention in four essays is on William Dampier, Willem de Vlamingh, Jacques La Billardière, Claude Riche, Charles-Alexandre Lesueur and Francois Péron. 'Putting Australian nature on the map' (four essays) looks at the

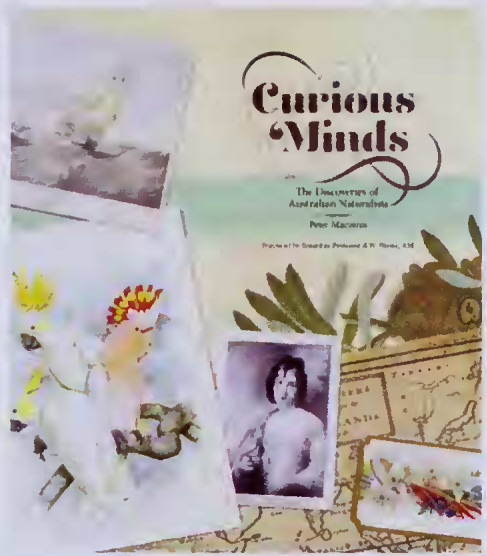
roles of Joseph Banks, Sydney Parkinson, James Cook, Charles Darwin, Ferdinand Bauer, Robert Brown, Matthew Flinders, Amelie Dietrich and Georgiana Molloy. Three essays under the heading 'Australia expanded' focus on George Bennett, John White, Thomas Watling, Thomas Huxley, and John Macgillivray. The five essays comprising 'Makers of their own fates' draws attention to Allan Cunningham, Richard Cunningham, Ludwig Leichhardt, John Gilbert, Thomas Mitchell, William Blandowski, and Gerard Krefft. Under the heading of 'True-blue naturalists', the author has included Ferdinand Mueller, Louisa Meredith, Harriet and Helena Scott, Louisa Atkinson, Ellis Rowan and William Macleay. The final section is titled 'Australia live' and looks at John Lewin, John and Elizabeth Gould, George Angus and William Caldwell.

The book concludes with a few paragraphs on 'The value of a curious mind'. Although short, it expresses a number of disparate thoughts; after a couple of readings of the piece, it is still unclear to this reviewer what value is being promoted.

Given the large number of 'curious minds' who might have been included in this book, it is reasonable to assume that those individuals who are featured have been chosen especially by

the author for a reason. It would be interesting to know the author's criteria for his selection.

In some respects, *Curious minds* is a curious book. It is magnificently designed, one might even say over-designed. The six collections of biographies are colour coded: in each section the title banner sets the colour, which is used as a highlighting background for at least one paragraph quotation in that section. Even the motif that brackets the page number picks up the chromatic scheme. It appears that the highlighting of a quotation is about design rather than information by the fact that many other quotes in the same section are not highlighted. When considered against these design elements, as well as the profuse illustrations the pages contain, at times the text by Peter Macinnes seems almost incidental to the book. Where it succeeds is in teasing out the interesting connections that existed between many of the individuals whom Macinnes has chosen to include. The author's forte is in providing a wealth of detail about his subjects, details which anchor them well in the curious mind of the reader. For this, and its illustrations,



Curious minds is a book of value, to be bought or borrowed.

Gary Presland

Melbourne School of Land and Environment
The University of Melbourne
Victoria 3010

Ninety Years Ago

THE LATE MR. W. H. D. LE SOUEF, C.M.Z.S.

AUSTRALIAN natural history has lost, by the death of Mr. W. H. Dudley Le Souef, Director of the Melbourne Zoological Gardens, one of its most ardent investigators and exponents. Mr. Le Souef passed away at his home at the Gardens after a long illness on Thursday, 6th September, at the age of 66. ... Mr. Le Souef had travelled far and wide through the Australian States in search of specimens for the Gardens or to endeavour to solve difficulties regarding native animals, birds, &c. He was always willing to bring natural history before an audience, and it is doubtful whether anyone in Australia has done better service in fostering a love for Nature in its many phases, especially among young people, than Mr. Le Souef. His lectures were generally illustrated by lantern slides from his own photographs, which made them doubly interesting. Though not a "foundation member" of the Field Naturalists' Club, he early joined its ranks, and for many years contributed interesting accounts of his various trips to its meetings. He was elected a member of the committee in 1885, and continued to serve in that capacity for some years. In 1900-1 he acted as co-secretary with the Rev. J. S. Hart, M.A., now Dean of Melbourne, and in 1901-2 in conjunction with the late Rev. W. Fielder. His papers in the Naturalist include visits to Mallacoota, the Mallee, Riverina, Queensland, Western Australia, &c. In these accounts his principal leaning was toward birds, but little escaped his observing eye, and other branches of natural history were not overlooked. ... He also had a considerable acquaintance with Australian ethnology. He took part in the Club expeditions to King Island (1887) and the Kent Group (1890), and later made a trip to Albatross Island with the late Mr. H. P. C. Ashworth. He was an authority on snakes, and compiled the list of Victorian reptiles published in the first volume of the Naturalist (1884).

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